

UNKNOWN CENTRAL INDIA

(6 of India's best UNESCO World Heritage Sites and so much more!)



ITINERARY:

This 13 days / 12 nights trip starts in Mumbai & ends in Delhi



Day 1

Land in Mumbai. Transfer to the world-renowned Taj Mahal Hotel, where we occupy DeLuxe Sea-Facing Rooms in the Tower Wing for **1 night**.

PM After lunch, sightseeing of Mumbai's colonial past: Victoria Terminus (UNESCO WHS), Crawford Market, High Court, Marine Drive, and more.

Dinner out at the renowned Trishna Fish Restaurant.

Day 2

Early afternoon flight to Aurangabad and check-in at Taj Vivanta Hotel ('Best' in town), where we stay **2 nights** in their Premium Pool-Facing Rooms. The city was named after the 6th Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb, who launched his conquest of the Deccan from here. Late afternoon visit of Bibi ka Maqbara, locally known as 'The Mini Taj Mahal'.

Day 3

We visit Daulatabad, one of the great fortresses of the Deccan, scene of many a battle, on the way to Ellora (40 minutes drive), a UNESCO

WHS. The 34 caves, hewn from a 2km long escarpment, are India's greatest examples of rock-cut architecture. The cave temples and monastic halls are Buddhist, Hindu and Jain, and span 500 years of development from the C7th. The ornate Kailasanatha Temple, Ellora's 'highlight', is the largest monolithic sculpture in the world! Approximately 3 million cubic ft of rock, beginning from the top of the cliff and working downwards, were removed to carve the representation of Lord Shiva's mythical abode on Mt Kailash.

Day 4

Today we drive (6h) through rural Maharashtra to the State of Madhya Pradesh, and the picturesque pilgrimage town of Maheshwar. On the way we visit and lunch at the UNESCO WHS of Ajanta. 30 rock cut caves lie within a horseshoe-shaped escarpment over the Waghora River gorge. The intricately carved and painted caves date from 2 distinct Buddhist periods, spanning from the C2nd BC to C6th AD, and are India's earliest and finest examples of Buddhist art. The caves were only occupied for a short period and over time were lost to jungle, only to be 'rediscovered' accidentally in 1819.



In Maheshwar we spend **3 nights** at the unique Ahilya Fort, according to Harpers Bazaar and Traveller magazines “Central India’s best Heritage Property”. Their food is also rightly renowned. The fort’s high ramparts overlook the bathing ‘Ghats’ on the mighty and sacred Narmada River, providing stunning views at any time of day. Late afternoon stroll exploring Maheshwar’s temples and lanes..

Days 5 & 6

Maheshwar’s lovely rural surroundings offer an endless choice of great excursion. Over 2 full days we shall: take a morning trip to the colourful nearby holy town of Mandleshwar and drift back along the river; explore the spectacular hill top citadel of Mandu (UNESCO WHS; once Central India’s capital), with 9 sq miles of abandoned palaces, mosques, lakes and pleasure pavilions; do a late afternoon cruise followed by tea on the Narmada as the sun sets; visit the renowned Rehwa Weavers’ Handloom Society; one can even go for a swim in the river’s exceptionally clean waters. We shall keep you busy with the help of our hosts and of course there is always the option to luxuriate doing sweet nothing in comfortable surroundings.

Day 7

AM This morning we drive (4h) to Bhopal, the lovely lake-side capital of Madhya Pradesh. Infamously associated with the 1984 Union Carbide disaster, the city is actually beautifully sited, very clean, and full of monuments, bustling colourful bazaars, and some of India’s best museums. We check-in at the excellent Jehan Numa Retreat, a luxury 26 suites green oasis only 2Km from the ‘Old city’ centre, for **2 nights**.

PM Afternoon stroll in Bhopal’s clean and colourful bazaars.

Day 8

AM Today we drive (1h) to the tranquil hill site of Sanchi, India’s oldest, best preserved and most extensive Buddhist stupa site (UNESCO WHS). Founded by the great Emperor Ashoka, from the C3rd BC to the C7th AD it was a thriving monastic complex. Abandoned in the C14th it was forgotten until ‘rediscovery’ by General Taylor of the Bengal Cavalry in 1818.

PM Afternoon visit of Bhopal’s unique Tribal Arts Museum.

Day 9

Today we drive (3.5h) to Satpura National Park, one of India’s best & least visited Tiger Parks and the only one to allow visits on foot. On the way we stop at Bhimbetka,

India’s largest and best prehistoric rock art site (UNESCO WHS). In 1957 the archeologist VS Wakander discovered over 500 rock shelters, in a sandstone ridge hidden by thick forest, covered in paintings done in bold, fluent lines. Most paintings are from the Mesolithic period (8,000 - 5,000 BC) and depict vignettes of daily life, hunting scenes and a range of animals (including a giraffe?!)

In Satpura we stay **3 nights** at Reni Pani Lodge.

Days 10 & 11

Two full days of ‘Forest activities’ exploring this wilderness in jeep, canoe, or on foot.

Over a century and a half ago, an officer of the Bengal Staff Corps found himself captivated by the Central Highlands of Madhya Pradesh. Captain James Forsyth was one of the first Europeans to explore and fall in love with Satpura. While the National Park was established in 1981, the Satpura Tiger Reserve was set up in 2000 under Project Tiger. The park is part of the government’s initiative to preserve and reclaim the dwindling forests of wild India.

The Satpura Hills run from East to West, with the Pachmarhi Plateau practically in the centre of the area at an elevation of 1,050 meters. The Satpura Tiger Reserve is 1,427 square kilometers comprising of Satpura National Park, Bori and Pachmarhi sanctuaries.

We shall be active early in the day and later in the afternoon, with the hot hours of the day spent at leisure at our very comfortable lodge.

Day 12

AM Early morning start to drive to Bhopal and a morning flight to Delhi. Check-in at The Imperial Hotel in time for lunch (**1 night**).

PM Free afternoon to shop, sightsee or just relax.

Day 13

Transfer to Delhi International Airport, for flights home.